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SUBJECT: EAC REVIEWS INCREASED AQIM THREAT, UTILITY
SHORTAGES, AND SWINE FLU

REF: STATE 41745

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reason 1.4 (g)

¶1. (S) EAC was convened by the Charge on April 26 to review mission preparedness for the likelihood of renewed and increased AQIM activity in Mauritania in the aftermath of the Canadian hostages release, contingency planning should fuel, electricity and water become unavailable in coming months, and Mission preparation for pandemic disease.

AQIM

¶2. (S) EAC reviewed the circumstances surrounding the release of Canadian diplomatic hostages held by AQIM in northern Mali and concluded AQIM is likely to refocus attention on operations in Mauritania including use of VBIEDs and the possible taking of western hostages. EAC judges AQIM primary targets would remain Mauritanian government and military facilities with diplomatic missions being secondary targets. Following the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador and the closure of their embassy, the EAC judged the relative AQIM attention on U.S. facilities had increased. EAC reviewed and agreed to recommendations for improved interior and perimeter defense against a VBIED attack and recommended limited re-engagement with Mauritanian military units to allow improvement in their ability to identify and interdict AQIM units transiting to or from Mali. EAC recognized a general threat of AQIM to take western hostages but judged that, given the known U.S. policy of not paying ransom, that U.S. citizens were relatively less at risk than other westerners from hostage-taking plans aimed to generate income for AQIM.

¶3. (S) Interior Defense: Acting RSO briefed the EAC on the plausibility of creating a limited armed defense element within our local guard force designed to serve as a visible deterrent against possible incursion onto the embassy grounds and to allow mission personnel additional stand-off time to allow them to reach their safe haven in the case of embassy incursion following a VBIED attack. Acting RSO advocated the arming of at least two properly vetted and trained local guards per shift with the erection of a hard firing point inside the compound opposite the primary vehicle entrance. Acting RSO also briefed EAC concerning ongoing Mission efforts to include appropriately trained U.S. military personnel as part of the Mission react team to provide, if time and circumstances allow, some capability to provide internal defense capability for safehavened personnel outside of the CAA and to assist personnel in reaching their safehavens. The EAC concurred with the Acting RSO's recommendations. RSO will work with DS to gain technical advice and funding to implement.

14. (S) Perimeter Defense: Acting RSO noted that the Mission enjoys excellent set-back but added that the National Guard units at the end of the frontage road remains somewhat vulnerable to being overrun. If bypassed, a VBIED would be able to reach our outer perimeter wall which, if breached, would allow foot access to our outer parking lot and primary perimeter wall. Acting RSO outlined plans to install a drop gate at the end of the street that would hamper vehicles quickly bypassing the National Guard detachment. Acting RSO also outlined plans to provide training for our host country National Guard use to enhance their skills in responding to a threat. The EAC concurred with the Acting RSO's recommendation. RSO will work with DS to obtain funding for the drop gate.

15. (S) Mauritanian military capabilities: Charge briefed the EAC that the current post-coup political situation does not allow for the resumption of pre-coup military training and equipping activities. Charge noted, however, that EAC could make recommendations for limited engagements that would have an immediate effect (within 3 months) that could help the Mauritanian military identify and interdict AQIM units crossing Mauritania's border for an attack or to take western hostages. Charge outlined three activities that could be undertaken that would coincide with renewed CREEKSAND surveillance flights operating out of Burkina Faso scheduled to start in May. First, the Mission would authorize SOCCE and AFRICOM elements to engage in limited interactions with the three primary Mauritanian counter-terrorism elements in Zouerate, Atar and Nema to ensure familiarity with the Creeksand platform and to ensure they have the ability to communicate with the aircraft if called in against a credible

and actionable threat. Provision of radio and other communication equipment to ensure communications with the aircraft would be authorized if needed. Second, in view of the recent Mauritanian military acquisition of two helicopters from Morocco, counter-terrorism units may have for the first time air mobility capability that would allow them to interdict mobile AQIM units. A U.S. military assessment of those aircraft, their range and capabilities, their equipment and maintenance package would be needed to determine whether the Mauritians will be able to retain that air mobility capability (since previous helicopters given by China quickly became hanger queens for lack of spare parts and mechanic training). Third, the Mauritians have indicated the desire to upgrade an isolated and deserted airstrip on the Malian border that could serve as a forward operating base against AQIM elements attempting to attack targets in central and northern Mauritania. A U.S. military assessment of that airstrip would determine what upgrades would be needed to make that forward operating base mission capable. In the case of both the helicopter and air field assessment, follow-on equipment and training would be warranted, despite the political situation, to ensure interdiction capability essential for the security of American citizens. The EAC concurred with the recommendations. Subject to Department concurrence, SOCCE will coordinate implementation with the Mauritanian military, SOCEUR and AFRICOM. Should these recommendations be implemented, Post Management would authorize the staffing of the SOCCE NCO and second MLE positions that have been held vacant since the coup.

Utilities

16. (C) EconOff briefed EAC on press reports stating that the sole exporter of petroleum products to Mauritania, Fall Oil, had threatened suspension of shipments to Mauritania due to non-payment. EconOff noted that private companies were making their payments so the commercial availability of fuel is unlikely to be negatively impacted for the next six months. The state power company, however, is in arrears and is threatened with suspension of fuel supplies. As over 80% of Mauritania's power is fuel-generated, the possibility

exists for massive power shortages just as Mauritania enters the hot season. The lack of power would, in turn, affect water availability. The Management Officer noted that GSO and RSO had been looking at contingency planning. Post's fuel reserves would be able to meet mission demands for up to two weeks. EAC determined that the unavailability of commercially available fuel would serve as a tripwire leading to fuel and water rationing and requiring Mission personnel to limit their residential generator use. Should shortages be significant enough to suggest an extended period of forced rationing, the EAC would consider a recommendation of Voluntary Departure. Prolonged fuel and water shortages that would prevent Mission from supporting residences would constitute a tripwire for consideration of Ordered Departure.

The EAC determined that while there are reasons for concern, the situation is not yet serious enough to warrant a change of operations. The EAC did decide to procure additional Jerry cans for use as emergency water supplies in residences and to clean and fill an unused water cistern under the Mission volleyball court. Mission will also ask the regional facilities manager to determine the feasibility of running the CMR and essential security systems off a smaller generator than the Mission's primary backup to minimize fuel use after working hours.

Swine Flu

17. (SBU) Charge drew the EAC's attention to REFTEL concerning the recent outbreak of swine flu. EAC assessed that while Mauritania may have rudimentary capabilities to detect and monitor the spread of pandemic diseases, it has virtually no capacity to combat them. EAC determined it would consider that low host country capabilities should a pandemic disease be detected in Mauritania.
HANKINS